

**Remarks by Ambassador Harry K. Thomas, Jr.
IJM Samar Satellite Office Closing Ceremony
December 2, 2010, Calbayog City, Samar**

Representative Sarmiento, Mayor Uy and our other honorable mayors here today, Director Corillo, government leaders, NGO partners, and friends: *maupay nga aga sa iyo ngatanan*. Thank you for welcoming me so warmly on my first visit to this beautiful island. I am delighted to be here today with such a passionate, dedicated group of people who share my commitment to the fight against human trafficking.

People often ask me why I care so much about trafficking, and I'll tell you: I'm a father. I have nieces, nephews, and godchildren. I share the desire of parents worldwide to protect those who are precious to us. I know that trafficking rings prey upon children, who may be subjected to sexual exploitation or forced labor. I know that we all share the common goal of a world in which this threat will never again face any member of our families.

The U.S. Government, through the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, has been proud to pursue this goal in Samar by funding the two-year Anti-Human Trafficking Project of the International Justice Mission's Samar Satellite Office. It has been an enormous honor to hear of its many accomplishments and to feel assured that your dedication to this cause will bring about the successes that we all desire.

They tell me I'm here to deliver an inspirational message, a task made easier because you are the ones who have inspired me today. I've met Mayor Uy, who has shared with me his vision of Calbayog as a model city for local anti-trafficking programs. I know that our other honorable mayors and local social workers provided valuable support for IJM's many TIP seminars and training programs in Samar, and that you are now forming and supporting Local

Inter-Agency Councils against Trafficking. I salute the barangay officials who responded to the call to fight trafficking in persons by joining the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children and who have implemented strong action plans to combat trafficking. And my tremendous respect goes to the community facilitators, those tireless volunteers who augmented IJM's manpower to spread the anti-trafficking message to remote barangays. Your commitment, coupled with the work of the amazing team at the IJM Samar Satellite Office, has touched thousands of lives.

You all know well the sobering reality of human trafficking. Every day, countless men, women, and children in Samar and around the Philippines make the hard decision to leave their families behind in search of jobs in such cities as Cebu, Manila, Angeles, and Zamboanga, or go overseas to countries such as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.

These people are simply doing what we all do: looking for ways to improve their lives and to better provide for their families. But all too often their dreams are transformed into a nightmare of exploitation as they find themselves forced or coerced into bonded labor, bought and sold in prostitution, exploited in involuntary domestic servitude, or enslaved in agricultural work, on fishing boats, or in factories. It is, simply put, a modern form of slavery, and it is time for all of us to work together to bring it to an end.

The fight against human trafficking is one of my priorities here in the Philippines. This is why I am so excited to see this group here today. This powerful mix of government leaders, civil society groups, media professionals, religious leaders, and citizens who care about the future of Samar and its children CAN ensure that human traffickers -- those who, out of greed, exploit the vulnerable -- are brought to justice. You here today can affect the lives of individuals who --

through your efforts – will be spared the suffering and the loss of hope, dreams, and even lives when human trafficking is driven from our communities and nations.

Traffickers operate in a swamp of lies and deceit and succeed where communities tolerate their presence. Victims are deceived because they lack the knowledge to distinguish between truth and the slick talk and pretty pictures proffered by traffickers who prey upon the hopes of desperate people. I am pleased to know that the traffickers' instrument of deceit is now less effective in Samar because of this project. I've heard about the hundreds of people who have been trained and oriented on the problem of human trafficking, the methods that traffickers employ, and the rights and relief available to trafficking victims. Now, the challenge for all of you who have been equipped and armed with this knowledge is to spread the word. Carry this needed message to every community and municipality. Tell them: **HUMAN TRAFFICKERS ARE NOT WELCOME HERE!**

Your strong partnership with the International Justice Mission has prepared you with the tools to take on this fight. Seventy barangays have adopted anti-trafficking action plans to protect their children, and Calbayog City recently passed a strong anti-trafficking ordinance. IJM's program has empowered the communities to find their own solutions to combat human trafficking; it is now up to each and every one of you to implement these plans. The problem of trafficking on the island can be solved if all local officials and community members aggressively strive to confront it.

So I challenge all of you to consider what more you can do to combat modern slavery, to consider what new techniques you can employ in your daily work. For government leaders, I challenge you to make anti-trafficking work a top priority in your cities and municipalities, and

to provide funding for programs to prevent trafficking, increase investigations and prosecutions of traffickers, and rehabilitate victims.

Fighting human trafficking is not an on-and-off-again exercise. We need to continuously apply the pressure, do more every year, and change our tactics as traffickers change theirs.

Know that you are not alone – the U.S. Government and I stand with the people of the Philippines in this fight. We are funding six anti-trafficking projects worth more than \$5 million. Additionally, I am convinced that sustaining economic growth and reducing poverty will build stronger communities that can fight the plague of human trafficking. We have recently signed a \$434 million grant through the Millennium Challenge Corporation, part of which will fund the rehabilitation of a key road segment in Samar to improve access to economic opportunities and social services. Also, by working with DSWD and the KALAHI-CIDDS program, MCC will fund projects throughout the Philippines, including in Samar, to provide basic infrastructure and services, such as water and sanitation, schools, and healthcare facilities. This locally-driven development process will help strengthen the beneficiary communities' capacity to transparently and efficiently design and implement public investment projects. I hope this will also strengthen their collective resolve to root out trafficking in persons.

So let us work hand in hand in making the island of Samar trafficking-free. If we stay vigilant and continue to work together, we can turn the tide in the global struggle against trafficking in persons. *Tama na! Kontrahon naton an trafficking!*